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Integration of United Nations information centres with field offices of the United Nations Development Programme: continued implementation of the views of host Governments

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The Department of Public Information has continued to implement the views of Member States hosting United Nations information centres integrated with the field offices of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) with a view to strengthening further the efficiency in the implementation of public information activities. At present, there is no pending proposal to integrate any additional United Nations information centre. Should any such request be received, the Department would review it jointly with UNDP and the Government of the host country concerned, prior to submitting it to the Committee on Information for its consideration. It may be noted that, building on their 20-year working relationship, the Department and UNDP continue to look for ways and means of rationalizing the use of the limited resources at their disposal, to improve the delivery of public information programmes and strengthen the unified image of the United Nations worldwide.

02-25202 (E) 260202

I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 56/64 B of 24 December 2001, the General Assembly took note of the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Integration of United Nations information centres with field offices of the United Nations Development Programme: implementation of the views of host Governments",[1] welcomed the action taken by the Department of Public Information to implement the views of those host Governments as expressed in their replies to the questionnaire provided by the Secretariat, and requested the Secretary-General to take the necessary steps for the continued implementation of those views and to report thereon to the Committee on Information at its twenty-fourth session.

2. Furthermore, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report to the Committee on Information at its twenty-fourth session on any possible proposal to continue, if feasible and on a case-by-case basis, the integration policy in a cost-effective manner, while maintaining the operational and functional independence of United Nations information centres, taking into account the views of the host countries to ensure that the information functions and the autonomy of United Nations information centres are not adversely affected, to meet the policy's stated objective of improving the provision of information by the United Nations. The present report was prepared in response to those two requests.

II. Continued implementation of the views of host Governments

3. In follow-up to the action reported in paragraph 4 of document A/AC.198/2001/4 with regard to the implementation of the views of one of the host Governments concerned, the Secretary-General proceeded with the appointment of a full-time Director to the United Nations information centre in question and he assumed his duties in August 2001.

4. Further to the action reported in paragraph 5 of the same document, the Department of Public Information, with the active support of the United Nations resident coordinator, provided computers, printers and access to the Internet to 15 university libraries located in that country, to provide the students with online access to United Nations information materials. It also organized a training workshop for librarians from the institutions receiving that service. To build on discussions between the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the host country and the Interim Head of the Department of Public Information last December, and in order to expand that outreach effort during 2002, the Department is in the process of identifying additional university libraries in other parts of that country that could join the programme. It is also exploring the possibilities for further strengthening those initiatives through the development of videoconferencing facilities, among others.

5. With regard to the action reported in paragraph 6 of A/AC.198/2001/4, the Information Assistant in one of the locations concerned was recently successful in the examination for promotion to the Professional category and has been reassigned to a new duty station. In order to further strengthen the United Nations information centre in that location, in addition to this staff member's replacement, the Department is in the process of recruiting a Reference Assistant. Moreover, that United Nations information centre has been instructed to work closely with the

public information component of the United Nations peacekeeping mission located in that country to enhance the outreach of both operations.

6. Taking into account the views of one host Government, as related in paragraph 7 of A/AC.198/2001/4, the United Nations information centre in that capital continued to receive increased resources, which, together with the active support of the United Nations resident coordinator, has strengthened its public information activities and enhanced its outreach. It may be noted that the Department has, as a matter of course, continued its efforts to restore additional resources to those United Nations information centres that have suffered reductions in staffing resources as a result of budget reduction exercises undertaken over the past several years.

III. Proposals for the continuation of the integration exercise

7. Since the integration exercise was launched in 1992, there has been some confusion with regard to both the aims and the implementation of the process, giving rise to concerns among some host countries, as well as within the Department of Public Information and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). To facilitate communication and to ensure that the appropriate action is taken regarding issues relating to the integration exercise, the Department and UNDP created a joint working group in September 2001 to review all aspects of cooperation in the area of public information at the field level. The group's main objectives are to project a unified image of the United Nations and strengthen cooperation through pooling of resources and closer teamwork. The Department and UNDP agreed that they would continue to cooperate through the working group in full respect of the mandates given by the General Assembly, both with regard to public information programmes and to the integration of United Nations information centres with field offices of UNDP. Moreover, owing to the personal efforts of the UNDP Administrator, the United Nations resident coordinators had become increasingly attentive to the important role of public information, resulting in greater cooperation at the field level. The Department and UNDP emphasized that one of the goals of the reforms initiated by the Secretary-General was to project a unified image of the United Nations, and therefore the country teams needed to work in harmony, under one United Nations flag and under the leadership of the United Nations resident coordinator. Within that structure, a United Nations information centre, regardless of whether it was integrated or had a full-time Director from the staff of the Department of Public Information, was a key member of the country team, acting as a focal point for the team's public information activities. Closer cooperation among all United Nations organizations represented in a country, accompanied by a consolidation of efforts and resources, would not only avoid duplication but would also lead to more effective implementation of mandated activities.

8. It should be noted that the 1992 initiative to integrate United Nations information centres with the field offices of UNDP was based on a history of cooperation between the Department and UNDP in the field dating back to the 1980s and culminating in a formal agreement on cooperation in 1990. One of the first objectives of the joint task force established by the Interim Head of the Department and the Administrator of UNDP in 2001 was to review and, if appropriate, update that understanding. That exercise is currently under way.

9. At present, the cooperation between the Department of Public Information and UNDP addresses the following five situations regarding field representation:

(a) A field office of UNDP and a United Nations information centre with a full-time Director from the staff of the Department of Public Information;

(b) A field office of UNDP and a United Nations information centre with the United Nations resident coordinator/representative as Director;

(c) A field office of UNDP but no United Nations information centre;

(d) A United Nations information centre and no field office of UNDP;

(e) A United Nations office with an information component, headed by a United Nations resident coordinator/representative in accordance with resolution 48/209 of 21 December 1993.

10. To ensure effective cooperation in those different situations, the Department of Public Information, with the assistance of UNDP, continues to devise suitable measures with the aim of improving access to information about the work of the United Nations in all the regions of the world. Accordingly, integration is a case-by-case mechanism, not a "one size fits all" solution. The Department and UNDP have agreed that, in all locations where the United Nations resident coordinator is required to carry out public information activities, he/she would report on those activities to the head of the Department of Public Information.

11. With respect to formal integration, both the Department and UNDP are in agreement that any proposal in this regard must be implemented in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly, namely, "if feasible and on a case-by-case basis, while maintaining the operational and functional independence of United Nations information centres, taking into account the views of the host countries to ensure that the information functions and the autonomy of United Nations information centres are not adversely affected, to meet the policy's stated objective of improving the provision of information by the United Nations".[2]

12. At this time, there is no proposal pending for the integration of any United Nations information centre with a field office of UNDP. Should any host country present such a proposal, the Department and UNDP would review the feasibility and cost-effectiveness of the measure and, if all the requirements were met, they would jointly initiate consultations with the Government of the host country to make a final decision on implementation.

13. There are currently 17 United Nations information centres formally integrated with the field offices of UNDP: Algiers, Ankara, Antananarivo, Asunción, Bucharest, Colombo, Kabul, Kathmandu, Kinshasa, La Paz, Lomé, Managua, Maseru, Monrovia, Panama City, San Salvador and Yangoon. (In recent years, centres in Kabul, Managua and San Salvador have not been operational.) In addition, in a number of host countries, the Department has sought the cooperation of United Nations resident coordinators in the supervision of United Nations information centres, asking them to perform the functions of Directors, initially on a temporary basis. This practice was in place long before the launch of the formal integration exercise in 1992, and it was usually done pending the appointment of a full-time Director from the staff of the Department upon a reassignment or retirement of the previous incumbent.

14. In recent years, however, as a result of successive budgetary cuts, and following the establishment of new United Nations information centres without the allocation of additional resources for that purpose, many centres have remained without a full-time internationally recruited director. A locally recruited professional runs the daily public information operation of such a centre under the general supervision of the United Nations resident coordinator. In such cases, the Department of Public Information expects the United Nations resident coordinator to enhance the resources of the United Nations information centre for the delivery of the public information programme in full respect of the mandates established by the General Assembly with regard to the public information function, including those relating to the activities of UNDP in the host country concerned, thereby eliminating the need for a separate public information capacity within the local office of UNDP.

IV. Conclusion

15. The Department has taken note, with appreciation, of the efforts made by United Nations resident coordinators in strengthening United Nations public information activities, and in assisting the Department in projecting a unified image of the Organization at the global level.

16. The Secretary-General appreciates the continued support which United Nations information centres receive from their host countries and welcomes the proposals by the Governments concerned to further enhance the effective operation of those centres.

Notes

[1] A/AC.198/2001/4.

[2] See resolution 56/64 B of 24 December 2001.

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Substantive questions: role of the Department of Public Information in United Nations peacekeeping

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The Department of Public Information, in implementation of relevant provisions of General Assembly resolutions and working closely with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, has continued to provide planning and operational support to information components of peacekeeping operations, to the extent possible. Enhancing this capacity, as expressed by the Assembly, would enable the Department to contribute more effectively to mission planning and support and to efforts undertaken by mission information components to build and sustain public and governmental support for peacekeeping operations.

02-27092 (E) 070302

I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 56/64 B of 24 December 2001, the General Assembly took note of the efforts of the Secretary-General to strengthen the public information capacity of the Department of Public Information for the establishment and day-to-day functioning of the information components of peacekeeping and other field operations of the United Nations. The Assembly also requested the Secretariat to continue to ensure the involvement of the Department from the planning stage of such future operations through interdepartmental consultations and coordination with other departments of the Secretariat, in particular with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, and to report thereon to the Committee on Information at its twenty-fourth session, including any possible proposals for enhancing the role of the Department in this regard.

2. In the same resolution, the Assembly noted the ongoing discussion on the report of the Secretary-General[1] on resource requirements for implementation of the report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations, stressed that the Department of Public Information should continue its efforts to strengthen its capacity to contribute significantly to the functioning of information components in United Nations peacekeeping operations and requested the Secretary-General to report in this regard to the Committee on Information at its twenty-fourth session. The present report is prepared in response to that request.

II. Planning and operational support for peace missions

3. The Secretary-General last updated the General Assembly on the Department's mandated promotional activities in the area of peace and security and its efforts to support peace missions, including through close cooperation with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Political Affairs, in September 2001.[2] Since then, in implementation of Assembly resolutions, the Department has pursued efforts to provide planning and operational support to as many of the 15 ongoing peacekeeping missions as possible and to a growing number of political and peace-building missions, including the mission in Afghanistan.

4. Since the mid-1990s, the Department's operational support for peace missions has substantially increased. These activities, coordinated by the Peace and Security Section, have been carried out within existing resources and in addition to the Department's mandated promotional activities in the area of peace and security. As a result, staff resources have been stretched to the limit, which has resulted in delaying publications and web-site updating, as well as other promotional activities. Furthermore, the increased attention devoted to public information in both peacekeeping and political missions has made it virtually impossible for the Department to provide adequate support to all these missions. Consequently, priority has been given to those missions that require immediate assistance.

5. The report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the recommendations of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations and the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations described the role of the Department of Public Information, and in particular of the Peace and Security Section, in developing the strategies, policies and capacities required to effectively plan, deploy and support the public information components of peacekeeping operations.[3] It also described the Department's other mandated promotional activities in the area of peace and security and provided information on the Department's resources in this respect. The report noted that all these activities were important tasks that help the Organization disseminate information about its peacekeeping and related peace and security work and that the Department should continue to undertake such activities. For this reason, the Secretary-General did not wish to pursue an earlier proposal[4] to redeploy public information staff from the Department of Public Information to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. He proposed, however, that a few public information specialists should be included in the Peacekeeping Strategic Planning Unit of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, requiring additional resources, and set out a proposed division of responsibilities between the two Departments.

6. In connection with public information capacity, for which four new posts were proposed, the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions noted that it was the first time that a dedicated public information unit had been requested within the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. The

Committee was aware of the importance of effective public information programmes in peacekeeping operations and the need to carefully identify and implement those programmes on the basis of objectives tailored to the specific needs of the missions concerned, including adequate resources for those programmes. It was of the opinion, however, that the Department of Public Information should have a dedicated technical unit to perform the functions described and that the operational activities and related programmes should be requested in the context of each peacekeeping mission. Accordingly, the Committee did not agree to the establishment of that functional capacity in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations.[5] The General Assembly, in its resolution 56/241 of 24 December 2001, inter alia, endorsed the conclusions and recommendations contained in the report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, subject to the provisions of that resolution.

7. It will be noted that resolution 56/255, on special subjects relating to the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003, adopted by the General Assembly on 24 December 2001, did not provide for any new resources related to the functions described above.

III. Collaboration with information components of peace missions

8. Notwithstanding its limited resources, the Department continues to collaborate with peace missions, including through its recent efforts to promote United Nations peacekeeping, peacemaking and peace-building. For example, it worked closely with the Organization's peace missions to revive the publication *The Year in Review* with an issue entitled *United Nations Peace Operations in 2001*, a compilation of stories from the field.

9. The Department has also continued planning and operational support where possible. For example, the Department worked with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations during the early stages of developing a concept for establishing radio stations for the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and later reviewed the memorandum of understanding that was drawn up between the United Nations and Fondation Hirondelle to implement the project. The Department screened and recommended candidates to fill a number of public information posts and followed up on their deployment. In addition, the Department temporarily deployed one information officer to the office of the Facilitator for the Inter-Congolese Dialogue during the meeting in Addis Ababa in October 2001 and the subsequent meeting in Sun City, South Africa, which began late in February 2002.

10. The Department continues to assist the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) in arranging to make its radio programmes available on the Internet by posting audio files on the UNMEE page of the United Nations web site. The Department also explored with UNMEE possibilities for radio broadcasts on commercially available transmitters and participated in discussions on UNMEE's public information strategy.

11. The Department recently collaborated with the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) to help revamp the UNMIK web site, which is now linked to the UNMIK page of the main United Nations web site. The Department also provided the United Nations Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina (UNMIBH) with advice on the use of the United Nations logo, format and links in its redesigned web site.

12. The Department has continued to participate in weekly video conferences with the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) as well as in inter-agency task force meetings to collaborate and coordinate with other relevant departments and the field mission, including in the area of public information. The UNAMSIL Chief of Public Information is a staff member of the Department of Public Information. The Department also assisted in the development and expansion of Radio UNAMSIL in its early stages.

13. The Department continues to work closely with the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) in publicizing its work by formatting and posting its press briefing notes, UNTAET regulations and mission publications on the United Nations web site. It provides similar assistance to UNAMSIL and UNMEE. The Department also worked closely with UNTAET on a photo exhibit and is now collaborating with it in organizing events in connection with East Timor's day of independence, in May 2002.

14. The Department routinely organizes induction sessions at United Nations Headquarters for newly appointed chiefs of information to familiarize them with standard practices and Headquarters resources. The newly appointed chiefs of public information for UNAMSIL, UNMEE, UNTAET, UNMIK and the United Nations Verification Mission in Guatemala recently participated in this programme.

IV. Interdepartmental consultations and coordination

15. The Department has continued its consultations with other Secretariat departments in the planning of new peace missions and in support of existing missions.

16. In support of the Organization's efforts to define and plan its role in the reconstruction of Afghanistan, consultation between the Department and other substantive departments has intensified, in particular within the context of the Integrated Management Task Force for Afghanistan, established in October 2001. The membership of the Task Force has included a representative of the Department who has actively participated in mission planning and support activities. Working with several interested non-governmental organizations, the Department also prepared an assessment of needs for the media sector in Afghanistan, which was incorporated into the needs assessment report for the International Conference on Reconstruction Assistance to Afghanistan, held in Tokyo in January 2002. However, the intensive nature of the Task Force's work, combined with the limitations of staff resources, significantly affected work in other areas. For example, the publication of a background paper on United Nations peace-building missions was delayed until early in 2002. There was also a considerable delay in publishing the above-mentioned *The Year in Review: United Nations Peace Operations in 2001*. Only the English edition came out in print and on the Web in December 2001. Other language editions were delayed, due principally to a lack of staff resources. Preparations for the meeting of field information chiefs, mentioned in paragraph 17 below, were also affected.

17. At the initiative of the Department of Public Information, a meeting of information chiefs of United Nations peacekeeping, peace-building and other field missions was held at Headquarters in December 2001. The meeting, jointly organized and sponsored by the Department of Public Information, the Department of Political Affairs, and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, brought together some 34 field personnel and a large number of their departmental colleagues from Headquarters. The aim of the meeting was to provide participants with a strategic overview of public information in peace operations and to encourage discussion of issues, problems and solutions related to public information work in the field. The meeting also allowed participants to share best ideas, techniques and initiatives and to learn more about existing support structures at Headquarters. The compilation of a report on the meeting, however, was delayed due to limited staff resources.

18. The March 2002 meeting of field presences, organized by the Department of Political Affairs, contained a segment on public information organized by the Department of Public Information. Feedback from the two meetings will be used to finalize the Department's draft guidelines for special representatives of the Secretary-General on matters relating to public information.

19. The Department of Public Information has continued to screen and recommend candidates for public information posts in United Nations peace missions. It has now become standard practice for the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Political Affairs to seek Department of Public Information expertise in this regard.

20. Ongoing consultations are being held with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and other parts of the Secretariat regarding the further formulation of standard operating procedures for public information components in peace missions and on other projects. The subjects addressed include start-up kits, new information technologies, rapid deployment and a conceptual design for an integrated process for establishing a new field information operation. Once new standard operating procedures are in place, it will be difficult for the Department to implement some complex tasks effectively without additional staff resources.

V. Enhancing the role of the Department in supporting peace operations

21. The General Assembly has reiterated on numerous occasions that it attaches priority to effective public information programmes in peacekeeping operations and the need to carefully identify and implement those programmes on the basis of objectives tailored to the specific needs of the missions concerned, including adequate resources for those programmes. In the same vein, as noted in paragraph 2 above, the General Assembly stressed in its resolution 56/64 B that the Department of Public Information should continue its efforts to strengthen its capacity to contribute significantly to the functioning of information components in United Nations peacekeeping operations.

22. However, despite the General Assembly's endorsement of the information support functions of the Department of Public Information, the number of staff dedicated to public information in United Nations peacekeeping has remained at the same level. For this reason, and as a follow-up to the recommendation of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions mentioned in paragraph 6 above, the report of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly on requirements for funding under the support account for peacekeeping operations for the period 1 July 2002 to 30 June 2003 will include a provision for additional resources for the Department of Public Information for the purpose of backstopping peacekeeping operations.

VI. Conclusions

23. There is widespread agreement that sustained public and governmental support is critical for the success of United Nations peacekeeping, peacemaking and peace-building operations. There is clearly a great deal more to be done. To enable the Department of Public Information to contribute more effectively to the planning and ongoing support of those operations, particularly in the case of large and complex peacekeeping operations, the need for adequate resources cannot be overemphasized.

24. The additional resources for the Department of Public Information referred to in paragraph 22 above, should they be approved by the General Assembly, would enable the Department to enhance its capacity to backstop public information activities in peacekeeping operations, as requested by the General Assembly, and at the same time to maintain its mandated promotional activities in the area of peace and security.

Notes

[1] A/55/507 and Add.1.

[2] See A/56/411, paras. 34 and 35.

[3] See A/55/977, paras. 239-241 and annex M.

[4] See A/55/502, paras. 133-138.

[5] See A/56/478, para. 32.

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Continued development, maintenance and enrichment of the United Nations web site in the six official languages

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is the fifth in the series addressing the multilingual development, maintenance and enrichment of the United Nations web site. It is presented to the Committee on Information for its guidance on the policy decisions required for timely implementation.

Two courses of action are presented for consideration and necessary action:

Action 1: *Replicate all materials on the English web site in the other language sites*;

Action 2: *Allow the web sites to develop independently in each language on the basis of the resource capacities of author Departments and Offices*.

02-27294 (E) 200302

I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 56/64 B of 24 December 2001, the General Assembly noted that "there is a need for the Secretary-General to continue to develop proposals for the multilingual development, maintenance and enrichment of the United Nations web site in order to ultimately lead to achieving full parity among the official languages of the United Nations" and requested him "to report thereon to the Committee on Information at its twenty-fourth session".

2. In addition, in the last report (A/AC.198/2001/8) to the Committee on Information on the subject, it was reiterated that the realization of full parity among the official languages would require additional resources and that the implementation of policy decisions regarding content creation would also necessitate the allocation of resources.

II. Background

3. The continued development and enhancement of the United Nations web site in all the official languages of the Organization has been one of the major issues of concern for the Committee on Information, from its twenty-first session to its twenty-third session. This issue has been addressed and proposals presented in four reports of the Secretary-General. The Committee on Information considered the first report on this issue (A/AC.198/1999/6) during the first part of its twenty-first session, in May 1999. The follow-up report requested by the Committee (A/AC.198/1999/9 and Corr.1 and 2) was considered at its resumed twenty-first session, in November 1999. A third report (A/AC.198/2000/7-A/AC.172/2000/4) was requested by the Committee on Conferences and was considered by that Committee as well as the Committee on Information at its twenty-second session. The fourth report (A/AC.198/2001/8) provided an update on the development of the United Nations web site, as well as upcoming development plans for the site. The present report presents an analysis of the prevailing situation and outlines a number of possible courses of action.

III. Update on the United Nations web site

4. The United Nations web site (www.un.org) was formally launched in September 1995 and has undergone many changes and refinements since then. In September 2000, a redesigned web site was launched in the six official languages. New pages covering specific issues have been regularly added to the site. Examples include those relating to terrorism, Afghanistan, the award of the Nobel Prize for Peace to the Organization and the Secretary-General, and conferences and special sessions of the General Assembly. It is widely accepted that the Department of Public Information has created a high-quality, user-friendly and cost-effective web site. This is especially noteworthy, considering the scope of this undertaking, the budget constraints within the United Nations and the remarkably rapid expansion of the World Wide Web. The web site has been acclaimed as a very useful tool and is receiving millions of accesses on a daily basis.

5. Webcasts of important meetings and events have now become a regular and popular feature, with the Department embarking on a pilot project to provide

webcasts internally within existing resources. In the last six months, the Information Technology Section of the Department of Public Information has provided over 292 hours of live webcasts, which have been archived for on-demand playback by users. In addition, over one hour of webcasts of the daily news by United Nations Radio in all six official languages plus Portuguese provide visitors with the latest news on the United Nations.

6. The United Nations News Centre has been further enhanced through conversion to a database platform and a major redesign aimed at improving its navigability and visual attractiveness. The redesigned site provides significantly upgraded access to all relevant material and more powerful search tools. Its new database-driven functions and more user-friendly structure offers one-click access to news stories organized by thematic and regional categories, as well as to automatically retrieved "related materials", including recent news articles and texts of press releases and briefings. The site also features enhanced "News Focus" pages, created in rapid reaction to major United Nations-related news developments to offer a wide variety of useful links to, inter alia, key resolutions, reports, statements, relevant United Nations offices and agencies.

7. The United Nations CyberSchoolBus, the web site for young people and educators, currently contains over 3,500 pages on the English-language site and approximately 800 pages in French, of which 400 pages were translated into French in 2001. The Spanish language site includes about 300 pages. An additional 300 pages will be translated into Spanish by the end of 2002. Currently, there is only a small amount of material available on the CyberSchoolBus site in Russian. Close to 400 pages which were translated in 2001 are currently being integrated into page templates and should be available in several months time. The number of pages available in Arabic and Chinese is very low. Since the project is financed completely through very limited extrabudgetary resources, development in this respect may not match the pace of that of the rest of the United Nations web site.

8. The United Nations web site currently receives, on average, over 5 million accesses daily from more than 165 countries. With almost 600,000 pages viewed daily in 2001, the web site has achieved yet another milestone, having recorded a total of 1.12 billion accesses for the year 2001, up from 11 million in 1996 and 488 million in 2000 (see table).

Table
Access to the United Nations web site

Year	*Total number of accesses*
1996	11 547 325
1997	42 777 271
1998	97 049 852
1999	182 046 126
2000	488 364 528
2001	1 120 265 550

9. The usage of the web sites in languages other than English has continued to increase slowly, but steadily. Users have been accessing the United Nations web site and, while looking for information in the various official languages, are usually redirected to the English site. The reason is most likely that the material being sought has not been translated into the desired language. Once users have experienced this problem, they tend to use the English site directly, knowing that there they will find the most extensive content. Annex I provides a snapshot view of the comparative usage of the language sites. After English, the level of usage is highest in the Spanish and French languages, followed by almost equal levels of access for the Arabic, Chinese and Russian languages.

10. As the United Nations web site has developed, there have been challenges along the way, as there are at present. Not only must the current quality of the web site be maintained, but it must also be taken to the next level, overcoming the challenges that may be encountered in the process.

11. In this respect, it could be argued that the levels of usage of the language sites other than English are not high for lack of sufficient content, or owing to the fact that the translations of information that users are looking for have not been made available. It is therefore necessary to create language units in order to effectively coordinate, maintain and develop contributed content and translations received through traditional and non-traditional methods and with the cooperation of other United Nations offices, for example, the United Nations information centres.

IV. Development and enhancement considerations

12. The United Nations web site bears the added burden that the world looks to the United Nations and expects its web site to be complete, uniform and well maintained — perhaps more than any other web site in the world. The difficulty in achieving parity among the official languages has been a major consideration and concern for Member States. The question how to reach communities with limited technical infrastructure presents both a responsibility and a challenge to the Department of Public Information.

13. It was considered in a previous report of the Secretary-General that a "critical point has been reached, requiring a careful analysis of all relevant issues with a view to taking a decision on the appropriate allocation of resources for further development of the new medium" (see A/AC.198/1999/6, para. 9). Indeed, exploring the full usage of the Internet can only be realized through the development of the technical makeup and infrastructure that are indispensable for supporting "the increased bandwidth and traffic requirements of multimedia contents, as well as the larger volume of traditional contents in all six official languages". It should be reiterated that "in the context of consideration of the multilingual development (linguistic parity), maintenance and enrichment of United Nations web sites, the first task would be to rationalize the structure of the sites, requiring a feasibility study on the complete redesign and restructuring of the sites in order to render them more user-friendly and flexible. Such a study should be conducted through the use of outside industry experts" (see A/AC.198/2000/7, para. 4). Since resources have not been identified for this purpose, the study has not yet been conducted.

14. Over the last few years, the Internet has achieved increasing importance and high visibility. The General Assembly and the Committee on Information have

recognized this, as well as the fact that parity among the six official languages on the web sites is an important consideration. In its resolution 53/208 C of 18 December 1998, the General Assembly stressed "the need for the continuous development, maintenance and enrichment of the United Nations web sites, with a view to achieving equal treatment of the six official languages on those web sites".

15. In its resolution 55/136 B, the General Assembly encouraged the Secretary-General to "continue his efforts to develop and enhance the United Nations web sites in all the official languages of the Organization" and requested the Secretary-General "to continue to develop proposals for consideration". In spite of the efforts made, multilingual development and enrichment of the site has been slower than expected, primarily owing to a lack of resources.

16. The United Nations web site, as unique as the Organization it represents, faces special challenges in achieving parity among the official languages. The closest in scope and expanse to the United Nations web site is perhaps the web site of the European Union, which is presented in 11 languages. Not all material is available in all of the languages, and the level of content varies significantly among those languages.

17. Creative options to translate material and web site creation are already being explored. The Department of Public Information has entered into agreements with two universities in Spain, which have agreed to provide translations into Spanish of portions of the United Nations web site, at no cost to the Organization. More than 30 documents have been translated in this manner and are of excellent quality. It is hoped that similar arrangements can be extended to other universities for possible assistance in the other official languages. The Secretary-General appeals to Member States to propose similar offers of support in this regard.

18. In addition, one relatively rapid way of adding a large number of documents to the web site in all official languages would be to make available the contents of the Official Document System, which already exists and is regularly maintained in all official languages, for free access through the United Nations web site, as indicated in document A/C.5/56/12.

19. Machine-assisted translation is another option which may be considered in the future. There is commercial software currently available that can translate basic text without human intervention, but the results are not generally of publishable quality. Tests have revealed that those translations do not yet work well with the type of documents most prevalent on the United Nations web site. If incorrect information or inaccurate translations were to be posted on the official United Nations web site owing to a translation error by the software, it could cause major embarrassment to the Organization. As such, any large-scale machine-assisted translation exercise would also need to be backed up by a team of editors for each language. However, it will be considered an option as and when the quality of the software for translation improves.

20. The Working Group on Internet Matters established by the Publications Board (see Administrative instruction ST/AI/2001/5), is already in operation and has established task teams to enhance the guidelines on United Nations Internet publishing, to include the issue of the availability of information materials on the United Nations web site in all official languages. It will review the existing

guidelines and propose additions and/or amendments to ensure coherence of information, avoid duplication and rationalize management of the web site.

V. Questions of parity among the official languages on the United Nations web site

21. In paragraph 2 of Part V of General Assembly resolution 56/242, the Assembly expresses concern over the content of paragraph 7 in A/AC.198/2001/8, which states:

> "While multilingual development, maintenance and enrichment of the United Nations web site has been at the forefront of the Internet activities of the Department of Public Information, progress has been slower than expected due to a lack of in-house expertise and resources in the non-working languages of the Secretariat. Furthermore, as indicated in an earlier report (A/AC.198/2000/7), it is also vital that the issue of public information content creation be separated from the issue of ongoing maintenance, coordination and management. Until those two issues — content creation and ongoing maintenance, coordination and management — are dealt with, the realization of a truly equal multilingual web site will remain elusive."

22. It is necessary to consider the entire paragraph in the following context. The Department of Public Information has reiterated that the two issues referred to in paragraph 7 of A/AC.198/2001/8 quoted above, i.e. that of content creation in all official languages and the ongoing maintenance, coordination and management of the web site, remain central to the achievement of parity among the official languages on the United Nations web site.

23. There are three basic categories of information and data that are placed on the site:

(a) Static elements that do not change and do not need regular maintenance;

(b) Materials that need updating daily, such as news items, briefings, press releases and the United Nations Journal;

(c) Databases that are continuously updated.

24. Some elements of the web site could be made available in all languages, particularly static elements (item (a) above). This would include the home page, most of the first-layer pages listed (and linked) from the home page and documents once they are posted. Added to this would be basic information about the Organization and its wide range of activities. Some elements are indeed currently available in all of the official languages.

25. As far as the other categories of material are concerned, prior to the advent of the Web, they were neither produced nor budgeted for production in six official languages. This is especially true of databases. It would appear that the United Nations web site, by aggregating all this content, has only served to highlight a situation that has existed for most of the life of the Organization.

26. It is pertinent to point out that, judging from the vast amount of e-mail queries and comments received by the various parts of the web site, it appears that user-demand for material in languages other than English is not high. That, of course,

may be due to the fact that connectivity in regions using those languages is an issue, as may be the widespread accessibility of computers in others. However, to resolve this issue, there are several possible approaches.

27. On the basis of its communications objectives, the United Nations seeks to ensure that all necessary and useful information is disseminated worldwide. There will always be the occasional exception, but all reasonable efforts will be made to ensure that the most necessary and useful information is disseminated to the largest number of people.

28. An important issue which needs to be addressed concerns those information documents and materials (such as press releases for example) which were never mandated for translation or production in all official languages. It follows therefore, that no mandate and thus no resources exist to produce them in all official languages solely for the web site.

VI. Possible courses of action

29. Having studied the requests from Member States and weighed different options for achieving various levels of parity among the official languages on the United Nations web site, two possible courses of action are presented for consideration by Member States. These are by no means exhaustive.

30. Another possible approach towards achieving parity among the official languages on the United Nations web site was also considered. This would make available on the web site only those materials that are available in all six languages. No material would be translated specifically for the web site. As such, only those materials that have already been identified and budgeted for translation would be processed and made available on the web site.

31. While this may appear to be the most cost-effective way of ensuring total parity among the languages on the web site, there are two major disadvantages to this course of action: it would require the removal of considerable amounts of material from the English and French sites that are not available on the other official language sites; it would also severely curtail the amount of material made available in English and French, thereby significantly reducing the overall value and utility of the web site. **This course of action is therefore not recommended by the Secretary-General.**

32. No cost estimates are provided because it is felt that guidance is required from Member States on the principles of parity before proceeding to a detailed costing exercise. It is reiterated that detailed cost estimates can be arrived at following an industry-standard feasibility study, as requested in A/AC.198/2000/7, which would ascertain the requirements with respect to staffing, technology and content management for the development of the United Nations web site in all official languages. Under either of the possible courses of action, the establishment of a sound basis for regular content-generation and maintenance, two basic criteria for any successful web site, remain of paramount importance. Therefore, in order to ensure adequate management of the much enhanced content in all official languages, the proposal presented in document A/AC.198/2000/7, annex I, continues to represent the minimum resource requirements. As such, approval of either course of

action would presuppose the approval of those resources. That annex has been updated and appended to the present report as annex II.

Action 1
Replicate all materials on the English web site onto the other sites

33. This action would involve translation of all materials and databases by the respective content-providing offices into all official languages. Each content-providing office will therefore need to determine the level of resources associated with the translation and processing for the web site. The Department of Public Information will continue to provide coordination, management and guidance for the entire site in all official languages. As indicated in earlier reports, this course of action would entail extremely high costs, should Member States decide that all current materials should also be translated.

34. One possible option under this course of action would be to designate a future date by which all supporting arrangements would be in place and continue with parity from that date onwards. It would be understood, and noted on the respective web sites, that only new materials would be available in all official languages.

35. Another option would be to exempt specific items from translation (for example, the *United Nations Treaty Series*, which occupies over 700,000 pages on the English web site.)

Action 2
Allow the web sites to develop independently in each language, on the basis of the resource capacities of author Departments and Offices

36. This appears to be the most prudent and cost-effective course of action, in that material would continue to be added on an incremental basis in each of the official languages. All materials that are currently produced, in whatever combination of languages, will be processed and made available on the web site. This could be accomplished by content-providing offices, including the Department of Public Information, by adjusting the publication of information materials in order to assure a steady supply of materials in each of the official languages. Content-providing offices would determine the amount of information to be made available in each of the languages based on their respective resource capacities for this purpose.

37. However, in this regard, it should be noted that most content-providing offices have not been able to create their respective web sites in the non-working languages of the Secretariat.

VII. Conclusions and recommendations

38. Over the last five years, the Department of Public Information has gained considerable experience and expertise in developing, managing and enhancing the

United Nations web site in all official languages, as well as 17 non-official languages.

39. It would be costly, time-consuming and duplicative for every content-providing office to seek to develop the same capacity and expertise in a meaningful way. At the same time, the Department of Public Information has neither the mandate nor the resources to render the entire United Nations web site into all official languages.

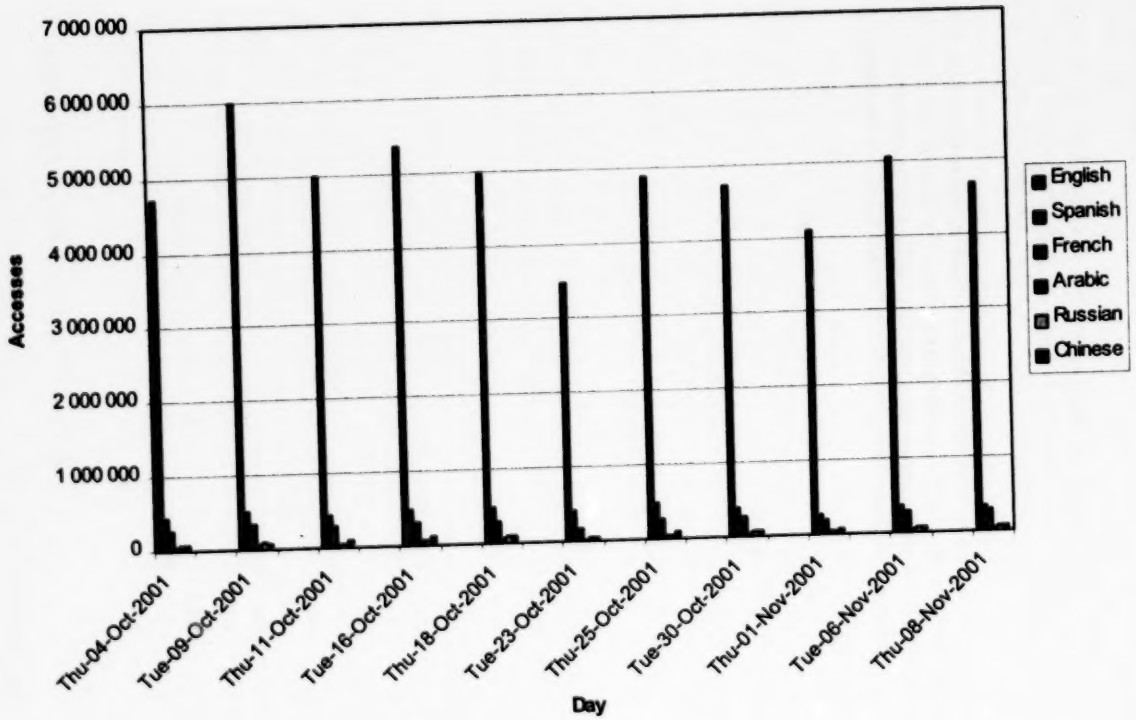
40. Should Member States decide to approve action 1 as outlined above, it should be noted that there will be significant costs to content-providing offices as well as for development of enhanced management capacity within the Department of Public Information.

41. **It is therefore recommended that Member States approve action 2 as outlined above, with the full understanding that, given the level of resources for translation available in the author departments, full parity among official languages on the United Nations web site will not be achieved for some time to come.**

10

Annex I

Access statistics comparison by language



Annex II

Resource requirements of the Department of Public Information for the ongoing development and maintenance of the United Nations web site in all official languages

1. In order to ensure the continued development, maintenance and enrichment of the web sites in the official languages, the following additional resource requirements, above and beyond the resources allocated for this activity in the programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003, would need to be considered by the General Assembly:

(a) The funding for the feasibility study proposed in paragraph 20 of document A/AC.198/2000/7, amounting to $100,000;

(b) Eight new Professional posts and six General Service posts for the Information Technology Section in the Department of Public Information, as outlined below.

2. These requirements have been recosted following the conversion of three positions funded from general temporary assistance into established posts for the maintenance of sites in official languages and the redeployment of other posts from within the Department.

3. The following resource requirements pertain only to the requirements of the Department of Public Information with regard to the management, maintenance and enrichment of United Nations web sites. They do not include the infrastructure support requirements of the Information Technology Services Division of the Department of Management, or requirements relating to the provision of content in other languages.

Component	*Posts required*	*Cost for 2002-2003 (United States dollars)*
Overall development	Web site applications specialist (P-3)	116 200
	Web site design specialist (P-3)	116 200
	Web site technical assistant (G-5/6)	79 300
Language units		
(six units)	6 web site editors/coordinators (P-4)	838 200
	5 web site assistants (G-5/6)	396 500
Total cost of posts		**1 546 400**

Total Professional posts required: 8
Total General Service posts required: 6

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Activities of the Joint United Nations Information Committee in 2001

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The Joint United Nations Information Committee, the subsidiary body of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) responsible for coordination in the field of public information, held its twenty-seventh session in July 2001. It addressed issues relating to the development of web communications, the communications strategies for the World Summit on Sustainable Development, poverty eradication and the human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome, as well as its own future. In October 2001, as part of its review, ACC, now renamed the United Nations System Chief Executive Board for Coordination, decided to do away with permanent subsidiary bodies and instead rely on flexible, substance-driven and ad hoc arrangements. Consequently, as of January 2002, inter-agency coordination in the field of public information and communication will take place through a new informal and flexible mechanism, the United Nations Communications Group.

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 46/73 B of 11 December 1991, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit reports of the Joint United Nations Information Committee to the Committee on Information at its consecutive sessions. The present report, which covers the activities of the Committee during 2001, has been prepared in response to that request.

2. The Joint United Nations Information Committee held its twenty-seventh session in Geneva, at the headquarters of the World Intellectual Property Organization, from 10 to 12 July 2001, under the chairmanship of Tore Brevik, Director of Communications and Public Information of the United Nations Environment Programme. Directors of information and officials from 27 United Nations bodies, including specialized agencies and related organizations, attended the session. The Joint Committee considered a variety of topics related to inter-agency cooperation in public information and communications matters. The report of the session was submitted to the High-level Committee on Programmes of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (see ACC/2001/13). Highlights of discussions and follow-up action on decisions taken at the twenty-seventh session of the Committee are described below.

II. Development of web communications

3. The Joint Committee held a broad-based discussion of the issues relating to web communications. A majority of the members of the Committee felt that it was important to create an Internet branding for the United Nations as a whole, which could be accomplished through the top-level domain <.un>. The Joint Committee noted that the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) had not scheduled the adjunction of any new generic top-level domains in the foreseeable future and that the United Nations system apparently did not currently qualify for a <.un> country code top-level domain managed by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). Further, members of the Joint Committee felt that, although that process could be long, complicated and possibly costly, it would ultimately create a powerful branding for the United Nations system and restrict the possibility of misuse of the United Nations name by others, as the domain would be managed by the Organization. Regarding the <.int> top-level domain name, which was available for use by all United Nations organizations, many members of the Joint Committee felt that that top-level domain name could not strengthen the image of the Organization as it was also available to other international treaty organizations that were not part of the United Nations system. The Joint Committee agreed to ask its secretariat to look further into the possibility of creating an Internet branding for the United Nations system as a whole, including the possibility of creating a <.un> generic top-level domain name with ICANN or a <.un> country code top-level domain with ISO.

4. The Joint Committee expressed support for the call by ACC and the Committee on Information for the establishment of a central Internet portal for the United Nations, encompassing all web sites of the organizations of the system. It was proposed that consideration be given to redesigning the existing "Global issues" web page on the www.un.org web site into a portal page to provide the links to all the relevant sites within the United Nations system. The Department of Public

Information was requested to coordinate the portal, with a view to developing a system-wide search facility.

5. Members of the Joint Committee also exchanged views and experiences on the issue of web journalism and the effect which the online availability of their publications had on their hard copy sales. About one half of the organizations present at the session created publications specifically for the web, but many more had their sales publications partially or fully available online. With one exception, all members of the Joint Committee reported that the online availability of their sales publications either kept the sales figures stable or even led to small increases in sales. On the other hand, online availability of non-sale print materials resulted in far greater circulation figures, especially in the field, at lower production and distribution costs.

III. Communications strategy for the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development

6. With the participation of the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs via videoconference, in addition to two colleagues from the communications divisions of the bilateral donor agencies of two countries members of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, the Joint Committee discussed the communications aspects of preparations for the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development. It was agreed that the issues before the Summit touched upon the mandates of most member organizations and therefore provided an excellent opportunity for system-wide cooperation and coordination of outreach efforts. Those efforts should bring together the environment and development agendas and spur the active engagement of civil society actors in the pre-Summit process at the country level. That would, in turn, generate a constructive, broad-based debate on all the underlying issues and help identify meaningful solutions to the challenge of sustainable development in a globalized world. To coordinate these efforts, the Joint Committee agreed to establish a communications task force to develop a joint communications strategy and monitor its implementation, along the lines of a similar group that coordinated the communications campaign leading to the 2001 special session of the General Assembly on human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS).

IV. Communications strategy for the global campaign for poverty eradication

7. With the participation of the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs and the two colleagues from the communications divisions of the bilateral donor agencies, the Joint Committee also considered the communications strategy for the global campaign for poverty eradication, envisaged in the final document adopted at the conclusion of the 2000 special session of the General Assembly for the five-year review of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development. It was agreed that, although many organizations of the system were already implementing programmes in support of the global campaign, additional efforts were needed to communicate a joint, coordinated message by the United

Nations system of organizations, speaking with one voice in advocating action for achievement, by the target date of 2015, of the international development goals outlined in the Millennium Declaration. This campaign also provided an excellent opportunity to further explore the ways and means of renewing cooperation and undertaking joint advocacy efforts with the bilateral development agencies outside the United Nations system.

V. Joint United Nations communications strategy on HIV/AIDS

8. With the participation of the Deputy Executive Director of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the Joint Committee discussed the ways and means of addressing the communications challenges in the follow-up to the 2001 special session of the General Assembly on HIV/AIDS, namely: (a) to increase political will and leadership to fight HIV/AIDS and to reduce the stigma of the disease; (b) to continue to move HIV/AIDS beyond the public health sector to become a political issue and a development challenge; (c) to fight fatalism and find a balance between communicating the seriousness of the problem and motivating all actors to continue looking for solutions; and (d) to place the issue of funding into perspective. Members of the Joint Committee agreed that the level of cooperation achieved among the organizations of the system through the communications steering group on HIV/AIDS, established in the lead-up to the special session, was a model for future cooperation among the organizations of the system in matters of mutual concern. In view of the importance of keeping the issue of HIV/AIDS on the global agenda, it was also agreed that the steering group would continue to function as a coordinating mechanism for the follow-up to the special session.

VI. Inter-agency cooperation in the field of public information and the future of the Joint Committee

9. In the light of the review of ACC and its subsidiary machinery launched by the Secretary-General in 1998 as part of his overall reform, the Joint Committee discussed the future joint coordination arrangements in the field of public information and communications. The Secretary of ACC took part in the discussions. Members of the Joint Committee agreed on the need to re-energize inter-agency cooperation in the field of public information, to make it more dynamic, issue-oriented, results-based, flexible and modern, and they developed a series of proposals aimed at reaching that objective.

VII. New developments since the July 2001 session of the Joint Committee

10. At its October 2001 meeting, ACC, now renamed the United Nations System Chief Executive Board for Coordination (CEB), pursued its review of the functioning of the inter-agency machinery. The summary of its conclusions (ACC/2001/4) is available on the web at ceb.unsystem.org. As part of the new approach outlined in that document, CEB would not have any permanent subsidiary

bodies (except for the two high-level committees on Programmes and Management). In all areas thus far covered by permanent subsidiary bodies, such as the Joint Committee, where the need for organizing and managing inter-agency cooperation remained or needed to be strengthened, CEB would rely on flexible, substance-driven and ad hoc arrangements. In particular, work methods would be adapted in order to promote better peer dialogue and interaction and ensure greater focus on substance, so that inter-agency meetings could be utilized to address selected policy issues of major concern to the system as a whole. In addition, the new arrangements both envisaged that CEB could ask relevant inter-agency networks to carry out certain tasks on its behalf, and such networks could also bring issues and policy concerns to the attention of CEB.

11. Following those developments, and on the basis of extensive discussions during the twenty-seventh session of the Joint Committee, the interim head of the Department of Public Information circulated a series of proposals on 18 December 2001. Those proposals were developed in consultation with the outgoing chairman of the Committee, and the Director of Information of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, who had been expected to succeed him as chairperson of the successor body to the Joint Committee. They outlined the new arrangements for future inter-agency activities that should lead to a more substantive, flexible and task-oriented approach in promoting coordination in the field of public information, and were endorsed by the heads of public information and communications of the organizations of the United Nations system.

12. As a result of those proposals, a new informal body, the United Nations Communications Group, composed of the heads of public information and communications of the organizations of the United Nations system, was established as of 1 January 2002. The principle of a fixed annual session has been retained as a means of promoting a common sense of purpose within the information community of the United Nations system and as a means of facilitating networking. The annual session will rotate among duty stations and will be chaired by the head of public information/communications of the host organization. A concise agenda, focusing on broad cross-cutting themes and issues of common interest to all organizations, will be arrived at through a consultative process. In view of the importance of the relationship with civil society, the work of the Non-Governmental Liaison Service will continue to be reviewed at the session.

13. In addition to the annual meeting, the United Nations Communications Group continues to hold weekly meetings at Headquarters under the chairmanship of the head of the Department of Public Information and with the participation of New York-based representatives of all organizations of the United Nations system, to provide a regular forum for consultation and coordination on communications policy and issues as well as on joint strategies and programmes. The secretariat of the United Nations Communications Group remains within the Department of Public Information.

14. To develop and coordinate the implementation of joint communications strategies on priority issues, often in the lead-up to major conferences and other events, the United Nations Communications Group will establish task forces involving the organizations active in the preparation of the activity concerned. This will be a flexible mechanism, with the frequency of meetings adjusted to specific needs and with sunset provisions, to be applied upon completion of the objectives at

hand. Two such task forces are currently active: one on financing for development and another on the World Summit for Sustainable Development.

VIII. Observations

15. As the Joint Committee ceased to exist on 31 December 2001, and in view of the informal nature of the new body, the United Nations Communications Group, the reporting obligation referred to in paragraph 1 of the present report no longer applies. Nevertheless, the Committee on Information will continue to be kept fully apprised of inter-agency cooperation in the field of public information on a regular basis.

16. For the future, it is expected that these new flexible and informal arrangements for inter-agency coordination in the field of communications will contribute to building a communications culture throughout the United Nations system as a whole.